



Psychology Capacity Building Initiative in the 2004 Tsunami Aftermath

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Report on Psychology Capacity Building Initiative in the 2004 Tsunami Aftermath

Introduction

On December 26, 2004, an undersea earthquake measuring 9.15 on the Richter Scale set in motion tidal waves up to 30 m (100 feet) high, causing much destruction, injury and loss of life in several countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The WHO Situation Reports in the following months documented the human devastation:

- Indonesia: 124,404 confirmed dead, 111,888 missing, and 400,901 persons displaced (February, 2005 Situation Report)
- Sri Lanka: 31,147 dead, 16,675 injured, 4,115 missing, and 546,509 displaced people (February, 2005 Situation Report)
- India: 10,872 dead, 23,059 injured, 5,764 reported missing (feared to be dead) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and a count of 647,556 displaced persons (March, 2005 Situation Report)
- Thailand : 1,527 dead, 8,457 injured, and 2,991 reported missing, no statistics on displaced persons (February, 2005 Situation Report).

There was widespread media coverage of the physical devastation and human misery that the tsunami wreaked. Countries, organizations and individuals across the globe responded with financial contributions, medical supplies, and provision of food, clothing and basic necessities, such as were deemed appropriate.

As the chair of the National Capacity Building WorkGroup for 2004-2008, Dr. Elizabeth Nair initiated discussion within the Executive Committee of the International Union for Psychological Science (IUPsyS) about an initiative to facilitate the establishment of collaborative and consultative networks among key psychologists in the countries most severely affected by the tsunami. The objective was to provide a forum to develop and facilitate training programs for evidence-based psychosocial intervention, paying heed to maintaining high standards in ethical practices, applying a "best practices" approach in service delivery, utilizing program evaluation and feedback, and incorporating local cultural perspectives and approaches.

The IUPsyS Executive Committee agreed to support development of a workshop for participants from the tsunami affected countries and other interested psychologists. Dr. Nair took the lead on developing a proposal outlining the workshop objectives, format and goals, that was submitted to APA by IUPsyS President J. Bruce Overmier and IUPsyS Secretary-General, Dr. Pierre L-J Ritchie. Funds for this endeavour were provided by the American Psychological Association (APA), and the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD). The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) agreed to provide funding for

follow-up activities to be held in Bangkok in November 2005 in conjunction with the Asian Regional Psychology Congress.

A workshop, *Building Psychosocial Interventions in the Tsunami Aftermath* was planned to be held in Singapore, 15-18 May 2005. Specifics of the planning and implementation of this workshop are set out in the following section.

Workshop: Building Psychosocial Interventions in the Tsunami Aftermath, IUPsyS Workshop, Elizabeth Hotel, Singapore, 15-18 May 2005

Workshop Planning and Participants

The planning committee for the Singapore Workshop included Dr. Elizabeth Nair (Workshop Chair), Dr. Bruce Overmeir (President, IUPsyS), Merry Bullock (Deputy Secretary-General IUPsyS, and Tsunami relief activities coordinator for the American Psychological Association), Dr. Gerard Jacobs (Director, Disaster Mental Health Institute, University of North Dakota, and APA disaster mental health consultant). Planning took place through scheduled tele-conference meetings and email communication linking Singapore, the USA, and Norway. Enterprise Promotion Centres Pte Ltd (EPC) based in Singapore, was appointed as the Professional Congress Organizer (PCO) to implement the logistics of the workshop.

The workshop planning committee identified the workshop faculty, program contents and procedures, and the participant selection process.. It was decided that participants would be supported from each of the four most severely affected countries, India , Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Participant nominations were invited by contacting national psychology associations in the affected countries when possible, or by writing to organizations or persons who were deemed knowledgeable about appropriate participants. The selection criteria were that participants be psychologists or other mental health professionals or trainers who were in a position to be instrumental in establishing of facilitating psychosocial support for tsunami relief in their country. Notice of the workshop was also placed on the IUPsyS web-page for information dissemination purposes. Funding allocated for the workshop allowed full sponsorship for 3 participants from each country, including travel, board and lodging, and workshop registration fees. It was possible to include a 4th participant from Sri Lanka because two participants were able to secure separate travel funding from UNICEF.

Workshop trainers and facilitators were selected on the basis of specific expertise and availability to participate. In addition to the workshop coordinator, Elizabeth Nair, they included:

- Dr. Gerard Jacobs, Director of the Disaster Mental Health Institute, University of South Dakota, with broad expertise in all aspects of disaster mental health content and training.

- Amgaa Oyungerel, Mongolia (Expert in public health, with specific training in Disaster Mental Health, and experience working with the International Red Cross)
- Dr. Michael Wessels, Senior Child Protection Specialist with the Christian Children's Fund, was appointed as a trainer. ISSBD had specified support for addressing child-related concerns, and in this regard, Michael Wessels, was appointed as workshop trainer. Together with Gerard Jacobs and Elizabeth Nair, this totalled 4 trainer/facilitators for the Singapore workshop.

Additional experts included:

- Dr. Wenbin Gao. The Chinese Association for Science and Technology (CAST), through the intercession of IUPsyS Board Member Kan Zhang, provided for expert participation by Wenbin Gao, from the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Science.
- Drs. Geoffrey Waite and Peter Hosking. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) supported two observers who provided consultation support for the country participants throughout the workshop.

Training materials, which included workshop participant and agenda information as well as copies of presentation notes and additional readings, were made available to each participant and workshop sponsors (copies are available from the APA Office of International Affairs).

Prior to the workshop, trainers Gerard Jacobs, Amgaa Oyungerel, Michael Wessells, and Wenbin Gao met with Coordinator Elizabeth Nair to discuss details of workshop implementation and procedure and objectives and rationale. After the workshop, a debriefing meeting covering the workshop implementation was held. Elizabeth Nair chaired the pre- and post-workshop meetings.

Workshop Agenda

The 3 day Workshop began with an overview of the Workshop Plan presented by Elizabeth Nair, followed by presentation and discussion of the psychological impact of the Boxing Day tsunami by the country participants. Gerard Jacobs then introduced *Disaster Mental Health (DMH)* and *Ethical Issues in relation to DMH*. In an evening session, Wenbin Gao presented information on management of SARS in China.

Day 2 of the workshop began with Gerard Jacobs presenting on *Needs Assessment*, followed by Amgaa Oyungerel discussing *Implementation of Programs*, in an interactive group discussion format. Country participants then had an opportunity to engage in preliminary planning of programs, in consultation with facilitators.

Day 3 began with Michael Wessells presenting on *Serving the Psychological Support Needs of Children in the Aftermath of the Disaster*, and concluded with *Presentation of Program Plans and Ideas* by country participants. The

full list of participants at the Singapore May 2005 Tsunami Psychosocial Rebuilding Workshop included:

Workshop Facilitators/Trainers

- G. Jacobs, Disaster Mental Health Institute, University of South Dakota, USA
- A. Oyungerel, Mongolian Red Cross, Mongolia
- M. Wessells, Randolph Macon University, Christian Children's Fund, USA
- E. Nair, Work & Health Psychologists, Singapore

Participants

Sri Lanka

- R. Amarasekera, Lifeline, Sri Lanka
- C. Hewage, University of Ruhuna
- C. Senadheera, University of Ruhuna
- S. Wickremesekera, Sri Lanka Red Cross

India

- L.S. Manickam, Sri Ramachandra Medical College & Research Institute
- M, V, Sudhakaran, Tamil Nadu Open University
- U. Vindhya, Andhra University

Thailand

- S. Tapanya, Chiang Mai University
- P. Sirivunnabood, Chulalongkorn University
- S. Pokeaw, Chulalongkorn University

Indonesia

- R. D. Purba, Indonesian Psychological Society
- J. R. Marieta, University of Indonesia
- S. Nurdadi, University of Indonesia

China

- Wenbin Gao, Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Australia

- Geoffrey Waite, Australian Psychological Society
- Peter Hosking, Australian Psychological Society

A group photo of all workshop participants as well as photographs taken during the workshop may be viewed on the IUPsyS website at www.iupsys.org/information/workshop-photos.html

Post Workshop Evaluation

Participants were asked to provide written comments on the workshop after returning home. A sample of participant responses under 3 subheadings: utility of the workshop, follow-up indications, and comments for improvements.

Utility of the Workshop

Thai participant: "I was made aware of what other colleagues have been doing in their countries and what I haven't been doing (and what may be possible to do) in my country.....I have acquired useful information from the presentations and discussions that we had. I have made contact and networked with more experienced colleagues and the contacts I made would become very useful when I need assistance or guidance. I'll know who to look up."

Indian participant No. 1: "....I found the workshop to be an extremely rewarding and fruitful experience for the following reasons: (a) it provided a tremendous learning opportunity to gain knowledge about psychology of disasters both from the expertise of the resource persons and the experiences of fellow participants from other countries and (b) it gave me an opportunity to reflect, discuss and concretize plans about future work in this area in my country. ... there is no shortage of disasters in my country, psychosocial interventions are yet to come of age. The inputs that my team members and I gained from this workshop will hopefully initiate and crystallize meaningful interventions in the future.Through this workshop I gained more clarity about concepts such as psychological first aid, disaster mental health and the reach and limits of psychosocial intervention.I immensely enjoyed and benefited from the informal discussions that we had over meal times, exchanging notes about the efficacy of the psychosocial model itself, a model that is at variance with the orientation of mainstream psychology.

Indian participant No. 2: "The sharing of experiences from different countries was a unique experience for me. From a professional perspective how the tsunami related trauma was dealt with through an organizational effort was encouraging. The lack of coordination among the service providers was also eye opening. It was not sure whether the volunteering efforts by the local NGOs and international NGOs led to a level of competition rather than a concerted effort to help tackle the issue.....The experiences of resource persons who had provided psychological support to different trauma situations in different parts of the world also broadened the thinking. The workshop helped to think and plan strategies ahead, to prepare for diverse traumas.Need assessments of the community is a new perspective for me as a Clinical Psychologist.

The possibilities of training psychologists who are available in our country in large numbers – but are untapped so far, in an organized manner, with the involvement of national and international societies has also been an outcome of the workshop. "

Sri Lankan participant: "Meeting psychologists from other tsunami affected countries and experts in the field and sharing experiences gave a sense of being supported which is invaluable, especially in the Sri Lankan context where psychologists are few...Hearing from the expert panel about accepted and effective approaches was immensely useful in providing information, direction and reinforcing the approach that I and many psychologists felt should be the way to go. It was also useful since I am involved in working with various ministries and agencies which formulate policy and plans for those affected by the tsunami.

Hearing from the expert panel was also particularly relevant since we are at the moment bombarded by therapists of all kinds promoting diverse therapies. It was useful to discuss these concerns with the panel members.Realising that we are facing similar issues and challenges and hearing of how others have responded to it or plan to, generated ideas for our own context

The opportunity to meet and begin a dialogue with all present was important. I will be meeting with psychologists and others working in the psychosocial sector and will share information with them.....The offer of support and links to information from the American Psychological Association and the Australian Psychological Society is very much appreciated."

Indonesian participant: "As a practitioner and mostly worked in the applied sectors, this workshop gave me a morale 'boost' in acknowledging the work that can be initiated by the social psychologist in a big scale disaster. Psychology as a science has to go to the full extent in fulfilling the well being of the people who has been affected

by the disaster not only helping them in the individual scale but also in the macro scale.....Bonding with another psychologist who experienced the same condition would also be very helpful, we learned so much from the discussion and it helped us in understanding our work better.....The knowledge and modules that were shared by the facilitators really helped me in reshaping and refocusing the works which are still in progress."

Follow-up Indications

Sri Lankan delegate:"The opportunity to meet and continue a dialogue, share experiences and progress will be valuable for the futureThe network of contacts is a valuable resource as a source of support and expertise as we continue to work in the field and face new challenges.....Updates on developments in the field and information of new publications and articles."

Indian participant No. 1:" Writing up projects for research grants both locally and internationally.....Review of our own work in developing strategies in providing psychosocial support. Discussion on different tools- its adaptability and applicability for assessing trauma.....As part of the training and in the university services, research grant culture is not common and therefore I do not have the skill in preparation of research projects that could secure funds....Continued communication link between the participants, different resource persons and different agencies that could help materialize the country programs that we planned. "

Indian participant No. 2:"I would like to see (a) review of country plans proposed during the Singapore workshop –work done, hurdles, limitations, bottle necks etc. and (b) more concrete discussion with the resource persons about how we can integrate psychosocial interventions in the overall disaster management policies of our countries; and (c) compilation of best practices that are at the same time culture-sensitive and culturally appropriate."

Comments for Improvement, additional topics

Indian participant No. 1:"Follow up of the projects that have been envisaged.... Probably feedback of resource persons on the strategies applied by the different countries would help sharpen the focus of attention. For example, in dealing with the trauma of children, personally I have found "drawing" to be highly useful. With supervision, the technique was used effectively. But some of the participants viewed it as negative, and it could have been used without supervision- or there could have been repetition of drawing due to lack of co-ordination... "

Sri Lankan participant: "The opportunity to meet and network....A more in depth training in some of the approaches."

Indonesian participant: "Managing people who worked in the event of the disaster as a volunteer.Anything on self resilience or to bring back basic life skills for the people Disaster management.... Psychological first aidHandling burnoutSocial organizingConflict handling/resolution (this would be very useful in Aceh and also Sri Lanka or even South Thailand)Bring back the local wisdom/tradition as an entry point of our reconstruction program Maybe a little strange ... but also in the project management as well ... If possible "

Indian participant No. 2: "A comprehensive presentation on actual work done in any disaster in terms of needs assessment, evaluation of program, limitations and obstacles, and efficacy of the program would illustrate the theoretical underpinnings of the model and would help the participants in designing programs in their own countries.... .Thank you for the wonderful opportunity. "

Follow-up Symposium in November 2005 at Asian Regional Congress, Bangkok

A followup activity, sponsored by the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) was planned in conjunction with the November 2005 Asian Applied Psychology Conference to be held in Bangkok, Thailand. Each of the four supported countries was asked to nominate one delegate to present a country paper, setting out the impact and the ensuing programs and activities in relation to psychosocial rebuilding in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The symposium was co-chaired by Elizabeth Nair and Ubolwanna Pavakkanun, the Organizer of the Bangkok Congress.

Country papers were presented by: Rahmat Ismail (Indonesia), Leister Samsudheer Manickam (India), Rushika Amarasekera (Sri Lanka) and Puntip Sirivunnabood (Thailand). Copies of the cover pages of their presentations may be viewed on the IUPsyS webpage at www.iupsys.org/workshop-follow-pres-appic.html.

Presentations included review of needs assessment, training programs, and local disaster research issues, as well as discussion of issues emerging from the tsunami disaster aftermath. These included:

- Needs for skills training in providing interventions to psychosocial workers who suffer from the emotional effects of working close with death, grief, and suffering;
- Vast disruption of education systems because of the physical destruction of schools

- Issues faced by displaced persons, especially for females who suffered from the lack of privacy, with inadequate toilet facilities.
- Problems arising from the influx of foreign NGOs set on providing direct psychological services, and intent on collecting data, that ignored a community's own cultural ways of dealing with grief and distress. There was a sense by the local mental health professionals that expatriate NGO practitioners were an impediment, especially because they had little prior experience or affiliation with the local cultures, beliefs, and way of life.
- Consideration of care arrangements for the elderly and the orphans which the tsunami created.

Other Followup Activities

- A workshop for 25-30 Indian psychologists was organized by Workshop participant Professor Manickam, in collaboration with the National Academy of Psychology (India).
- A symposium presenting findings and developments from the Singapore workshop and Asian Regional Conference is planned for the 2006 International Congress of Applied Psychology (Athens).
- A focused workshop for 3-4 participants from each of the four countries represented at the Singapore workshop is planned to be held in Jakarta in August 2006, in conjunction with the First ARUPS (ASEAN Regional Union of Psychological Science) Congress.
- Followup presentations are planned for the 2007 APA Convention, and the 2008 International Congress of Psychology (Berlin).

Lessons Learned

The convocation of participants across affected countries raised a host of common issues and strategies. The following points itemize some of the "lessons learned" to date:

- The local culture, way of life, religion, and beliefs, should underlie intervention planning (with the caveat that there is no infliction of injury, hurt, or trauma).
- Persons without knowledge, awareness or respectful sensitization to the local context should not be permitted to engage in delivering direct psychological services. Participants believed these persons should be appropriately censured by the professional associations of their own countries.
- Attention needs to be given to training key persons in local mental health professions on the management of persons and agencies in the event of large scale crisis and disaster.

- Much was gained from the opportunity to meet, share experiences, and to discuss, for the representatives from the national psychology groupings in the four countries; there was a desire to maintain a longer term agenda for the four countries to meet periodically, to discuss progress and projects, and to learn from sharing experiences and discussion.
- There is a dearth of research on the impact of a large scale disaster on recovery, mental health and wellness. The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami affords an opportunity to monitor and review the impact of various interventions in the four affected countries. The richness of the data is immeasurable, factoring in the different major religious persuasions involved in the four countries (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, animism, and Christianity).

Summary

In conclusion, the May 2005 Singapore Workshop on Psychosocial Rebuilding in the Tsunami Aftermath was a success. It provided an invaluable opportunity for professional collaboration, in a timely manner, at an occasion where it was much needed. The workshop activities served to initiate information exchange and ideas for country specific followup activities..

To maximize the unique opportunity for adding to the fund of knowledge in an area which is of great human importance, it is vital that the international psychology community assumes leadership in continuing to provide support to national psychology organizations in continuing collaboration and learning at focused workshops, and presentations at conferences where there can be debate and discussion. The outcome would surely benefit all psychologists.

Submitted by Pierre L.-J. Ritchie

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Based on the Report prepared by Elizabeth Nair

IUPsyS Executive Board Member (2000-2008), Chair, IUPsyS National Capacity Building Workgroup (2004-2008)